

FAQs on GFSI-Recognized Food Safety & Quality Schemes

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Demand for Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)-recognized food safety and quality certification isn't going away — but here's hoping industry confusion over the various standards will! The following answers to these frequently asked questions might help.

What is a “GFSI recognized scheme”?

GFSI stands for the Global Food Safety Initiative, a division of the Consumer Goods Forum which was founded in 2000 by European retailers. GFSI is a benchmarking organization (*not* a standard in and of itself).

What qualifies as a GFSI recognized scheme?

The following components must be present in order to be GFSI recognized:

- A certification scheme for a food safety management system.
- An audit protocol.
- The scheme and audit protocol are owned by an appropriate organization.
- An acceptable standard (such as BRC, SQF, FSSC 2200).
- Successful benchmarking against GFSI guidance documents.

Why bother certifying to a GFSI-recognized scheme?

You probably already know the answer to this one — many, if not most, of your larger customers (whether retail, foodservice or other food manufacturers) are demanding this kind of certification from their suppliers. Not to mention that complying for a GFSI-recognized scheme ties in beautifully with your GMPs, HACCP programs, and FSMA compliance.

How many GFSI-recognized schemes are there?

Currently there exist 10 — half of which are specific to sectors (e.g. aquaculture; packaging; red meat; produce) or country (CanadaGAP). [GFSI updates](#) [1]its recognized schemes from time to time.

Which schemes are the most popular in North America?

The three most sought-after GFSI-recognized schemes for food manufacturing in the U.S. at this time are SQF 2000, BRC Global Standard for Food Safety and FSSC 2200, roughly in that order. (Outside of North America, the IFS standard is required by all major retailers in many EU countries.)

What do all GFSI recognized schemes have in common?

They all involve:

- Risk assessment and/or HACCP.
- Preventative controls.
- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and/or prerequisite programs; (PRPs).
- Continuous improvement, management systems and commitment.

What's the difference between SQF 2000 and BRC?

There are a few key differences, mainly:

1. SQF separates food safety (Level 2); safety & quality (Level 3). BRC combines them.
2. SQF has “desk” audit as well as on-site. BRC just has the on-site audit.
3. With SQF, all audits are announced. BRC offers both announced and announced audits.
4. SQF has a mandatory annual, on-site audit for recertification. BRC's is voluntary.
5. SQF has a system of scoring plus grading. BRC just has grading.
6. You need a score of at least 80 to avoid SQF surveillance audits. You need a C grade to avoid with them with BRC.
7. An internal full-time SQF practitioner is required. BRC has no such requirement.
8. SQF addresses high risk. BRC addresses high risk and high care.
9. SQF 2000 applies to 30 categories for food processing; SQF 1000 has 5 categories outside food processing (food wholesaling & distribution; food brokers; animal feeds; catering & foodservice; food retailing). BRC applies to 18 categories for food processing and packing.
10. SQF Level 3 (not Level 2) can be used as a label on products. The BRC mark cannot be used on products.

How do these safety and quality schemes tie into HACCP?

Although Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point has not been a GFSI-recognized scheme since 2013, HACCP is a good place to start for certification to a GFSI-recognized scheme. SQF requires the documented food safety plan and food quality

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plan to be developed in accordance with the HACCP method, and BRC includes specifics regarding the HACCP plans.

How do GMPs tie in?

All GFSI-recognized standard schemes require the company to have effective PRPs in place, which can include Current Good Manufacturing Processes (cGMP) enforced in the U.S. by the FDA.

What about ISO?

ISO 9001:2008 certification is another jumping off point for certification for food safety and quality. A large amount of ISO 9001 documentation, requirements and quality reviews were compliant with the SQF code during their certification process, notes the technical services team at [G.S. Dunn](#) [2], the world's largest dry mustard miller.

Another GFSI-recognized scheme for food safety, FSSC 2200 (also known as FS 2200), uses the ISO standard, ISO 22000, along with applicable documents for prerequisite programs (PAS 220) based on the food sector. The Foundation of Food Safety Certification, founded in 2004, manages the FSSC 2200 standard as well as legally owns the HACCP food safety systems certification scheme. FSSC 2200 has been developed for processors of animal products, perishable vegetal products, products with a long shelf life, (other) food ingredients like additives, vitamins, bio-cultures, and food packaging material manufacturing.

How is an auditor selected?

Availability of auditors in your geographic region is important; if there are no SQF, BRC or FSSC auditors close by, your company will have to pay for their travel. As well, your food sector and the type of products you make or distribute could be factors in auditor selection. For example, the auditor Quality Assurance International (QAI) claims to be "the only USDA-accredited organic certifying agency able to offer joint certification to BRC Global Standard for Food Safety, SQF 2000 and FSSC 2200."

Will more than one standard be required?

This might be where the food safety and quality compliance field is heading — a company conforming to more than one GFSI-recognized scheme for maximum effectiveness. Some auditors are now receiving requests to conduct back-to-back audits for two schemes. (When developed at the same time, documentation can be coded for both SQF and BRC with only slight changes.)

So now, more than ever, is the time to jump on the SQF 2000 /BRC/FSSC 2200 bandwagon if you aren't already moving in that direction.

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